Dear Howard, 4/7/78

Much good news. I report it from a heavy weariness that began Monday, with intermissions, so if you have any questions perhaps it is best to ask or speak to Jim.

Our meeting with Shea and Linda Robinson of his staff went very well. Despite the past I am satisfied that while he will maintain the position one might expect of one with his responsibilities he is for maximum possible disclosure, is responsible for some of the recent improvments, and is fair-minded. Maybe I understate.

We had no hassles at all. Not quite that good with Daniel Metcalfe of Civil but maybe we did get through a bit to him. We spent about an hour with him after more than four in Shea's office.

When I saw how things were going - and he was pretty well up-to-date- I thought it was time to make an offer and I did. He and Jim thereafter kicked a variant around. This may mean a little research for you.

Now dor specifics.

I am getting the 40,001 pages, as released, about the middle of next week. Free. His decision covers all JFK and King.

They are getting started on the Dallas and New Orleans field office files. There are more pages there than HQ released. They understand that after we review them we may ask for more but that we are beginning with them to see how we can hold requests down. They are sending a legal/FBI crew down to Dallas from D.C. They are going to make a careful inventory of all files and we get a copy. (We also won on worksheets although the status call was abruptly cancelled for other reasons, below). We worked out an agreement to have the first good-sized batch reviewed by the Shea staff before they go through all of it and we have to ask for reprocessing, as we done with King and will. If we have to litigate withholdings we'll do that then. Processing will start in about a month, in D.C.

I was quite concerned about the arbitrary and capricious withholdings in the King records. So is jim. So, while we were discussing this with Shea and recognizing the problem his office entirely and the FBI to a degree can have in knowing what is public and what isn't/ and I saw he was aware of this from the King experiences I said I had a suggestion that would cost them much less than it would save them: hire you as a consultant, at the regularly consultancy rate. He did not agree or disagree or say it is not possible. He did think it would be more appropriate at Civil, where I did not come out with that proposal. Then he and Jim kicked aoround what Jim asked about a master. Only they did not know the requirements, qualifications, etc. (So research fast, please.)

There is no doubt that with good intentions they'll need help for an honest job. I do not expect an honest job. So they'll need even more help to avoid what is even more costly, litigation that can be avoided. (While I didn't say it I would agree to be bound by what you do, say and decide and would consult if you ask if I have knowledge, etc., w/o any charge for my time.)

About the time we start leaning on them over King they'll be more receptive. They were not unreceptive. I think that Shea will, if he has any say, want something like this because of an approach Jim and I took: Does the Department want this to be a perpetual taker of its time? The interest and subject will not die. I added that they ought be anxious to be able to use me and that is not forever.

If such decisions were made on the basis of reason or effeciency or cost there is no doubt they'd grab it. But I do not expect reason. However, I have a good feeling about it and I believe the compensation would be good.

My idea is that after they had a certain volume of records ready for last review, with the excisions made, you could go over them and point out errors, what is public,

things like that, before everything is fixed and for them final and for all sides much trouble, time wasted and costs.

I am not exactly clear on the role of master but I have some recollections from the time Jim and I proposed Bill Florence as a master to Aubrey Robinson in the transcripts suit. A master would go over the unexpurgated records when excisions are indicated by the analysts. While I believe this would be much better for the government I also believe that in such matters the FBI awaits the invention of shoes for jackasses. I fear they are opposed to everything, regardless of how much to their interest it may be. I think they are not concerned with where their interest lies and are concerned with doing what they can to and against me.

Let me have your thoughts unless you would rather discuss with Jim.

My impression of Shea is that he is a good human being who really wants to have the Department live within the law without making all its records public by releasing those that should not be released. So while we might not agree on what should not be released I anticipate that our relations with him henceforth will be at least as good as we might expect and probably better. I'm without doubt about his good faith, at least on a personal level. I am sure he would like to have the load of his overworked office lightened all it can be and that he would like the Department's costs and troubles to be minimized.

I can't say this for Civil. Restricting myself to the immediate, Metcalfe may or may not be bucking for Brownie points but he appears to be in fear of FBI opposition.

The meeting was not at all unfriendly but it was also not without its pointed moments. He does understand that we can file more suits and given the feeling that we need to will do exactly that. On the other hand, I told him I could simplify their problems if I have what I have lacked, confidence in good faith. With illustrations, meaning of other than good faith. He'll have to bounce it all off his bosses and the FBI. And then probably bounce a bit himself from it. But I expect better performance than we got in King and one of the reasons is FBI unhappiness about being called to bock and having all that work to do over again (Jim gave Shea some illustrations of the silliness and the existing situation.)

The status call was cancelled so abruptly Jim got a message from Metcalfe about on hour before it while we were with Shea. Oberdorfer recused himself. Metcalfe had writ- Oberdorfer, who has the first case, Dallas, as well as the worksheets case, and also Robinson, who has New Orleans, asking that they be consolidated. This would ordinarily mean that O. would get the N.O. case. However, instead he recused himself then, meaning very promptly, less than a day. Metcalfe may be right in fearing that O. interpreted this as O thinking DJ expected him to be partisan because he was with or was head of the Tax Division at about the time of the JFK assassination. When I heard this I said that while Ruby's tax returns are available Oswald's are not. Impact. Of course I do not know and maybe this does not explain the delay in recusal until the last minute. But it is interesting.

There is no sweat on Jim's fees in C.A.77-2155, the Gesell/FBI HQ case. They have already acknowledged. May haggle a bit over hourly rate but we doubt much. Just enough to make a show of having chiselled. He'll get about $6,000 but it was a very hard week.

Best,